

Letter to Army Secretary McHugh Urges Use of Project Labor Agreements to Provide Jobs for Hudson Valley Residents and Ensure High Quality of Work

Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) and Congressman John Hall (D-NY) this week urged U.S. Secretary of the Army John McHugh to use Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) for major construction projects at the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point in New York. PLAs, which are agreements to use a certain percentage of locally-based workers, would create local jobs, encourage greater partnerships between the USMA and local communities, ensure high quality workmanship on projects, and increase the likelihood that complex projects will be completed on time and within budget.

In June Hinchey and Hall wrote the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers to establish the use of PLAs at West Point. A recent response from the Army's Chief Counsel has indicated that the Army is in the process of issuing guidance on the use of PLAs. Today's letter asks Secretary McHugh to ensure that any guidance issued incorporates the use of Project Labor Agreements in a manner that ensures local workers will have priority on construction projects at West Point.

"I've been working to ensure that local construction laborers, carpenters, plumbers, electricians and other tradespeople are employed whenever construction projects are needed at West Point," said Hinchey. "The use of PLAs at West Point would create local jobs, strengthen our region's economy and the partnership between the Academy and our local communities, and ensure that major projects are completed on time and within budget. We have a highly-skilled workforce right here in the Hudson Valley and we should not be awarding major contracts to firms from other states and regions of the country."

"West Point is a great symbol of this region and our Nation, the use of Hudson Valley workers for construction projects is a needed boost for those having difficulty finding jobs," said Rep. Hall. "Those who live here have a vested interest in West Point having a successful future. The Army does not need to look anywhere else for workers, the Hudson Valley workforce is strong, willing and able to provide the skilled labor needed to complete key projects around the region."

Last year, President Obama signed an Executive Order to promote the efficient administration and completion of federal construction projects through the use of PLAs. "It is the policy of the federal Government to encourage executive agencies to consider requiring the use of project labor agreements in connection with large-scale construction projects in order to promote economy and efficiency in Federal procurement," noted the President. This Executive Order overturned a previous directive of the Bush administration prohibiting the use of such agreements for federal construction projects. While Obama's directive encourages the use of

PLAs, it does not mandate their use. Hinchey and Hall are working to ensure that PLAs are used by the USMA.

A March 2009 study published by School of Industrial Labor Relations at Cornell University concluded, "Project Labor Agreements make sense for public works projects because they promote a planned approach to labor relations, allow contractors to more accurately predict labor costs and schedule production timetables, reduce the risks of shoddy work and costly disruptions, and encourage greater efficiency and productivity."

The full text of the letter from Hall and Hinchey to U.S. Department of the Army Secretary John McHugh is appended below.

September 15, 2010

The Honorable John McHugh
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Army
1600 Army Pentagon
Washington, DC 20310-1600

Dear Secretary McHugh:

As members of the West Point Board of Visitors and representatives of New York's Hudson Valley, we are writing to request your assistance and consideration in establishing the use of Project Labor Agreements (PLAs) for major construction projects at the United States Military Academy (USMA) at West Point in New York.

As you know, last year President Obama signed Executive Order 13502, which reversed a previous Bush Administration Executive Order, and encourages the use of PLAs for federal government construction projects. In the next fiscal year, there are three major construction projects being planned at West Point that would meet the cost threshold for PLA consideration. We strongly urge you to support the use of PLAs for these construction projects.

In response to our letter to the Army Corps of Engineers in June regarding this issue, the Army's Chief Counsel indicated that the Army was in the process of issuing guidance to all Corps Directorates of Contracting regarding PLAs. We strongly believe PLAs are effective tools that should be applied widely. At West Point, using PLAs will foster a more active partnership between the USMA and the local, civilian communities in our districts, where many members of the Academy's staff live. In addition to increasing the use of local workers, PLAs have also been effective in ensuring that projects are completed in a timely manner and within budget. Further, partnership agreements with the Hudson Valley Building & Construction Trades Council have helped to ensure the highest quality of work from our local tradesmen and tradeswomen and been utilized successfully in a wide range of major local construction projects.

We are deeply proud of the heritage and importance of the USMA at West Point, as we know you are as a former member of the Board of Visitors. We are also confident that implementing President Obama's Executive Order and utilizing PLAs for upcoming construction projects would help ensure the highest quality of work at West Point and strengthen the relationship between the Academy and our local communities.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. We look forward to your response.

Sincerely,

Maurice D. Hinchey
John Hall